Lafayette Historical Society
P.O. Box 133
Lafayette, CA 94549

Bulletin, Vol. X, No. 4 April, 1984

President: Ray Peters Newsletter Editor: Nancy Midwood

FROM THE PRESIDENT . . .

Have you heard of the farmer that turned left into his driveway without signalling? The fellow in the car behind him hit him broadside. When berated for his failure to signal, the farmer replied, "Why should I signal? I always turn left there."

I have a box of old photos in the basement, handed down to me from my family through several generations. Whoever took the pictures certainly knew who the subjects were and where the action took place. I don't. I wish I did.

Those who write on the backs of their photographs do a service for their successors. Those that don't are like the farmer that "always turned left there."

We have our share of uncaptioned photos in the Society's files. We wish we knew who, where and when. We plan to put them on display at the potluck dinner. Please browse through them. If you can identify anything, please let us know. If you can't, you'll see my point.

Historical negligence doesn't stop with photography. Who knows what place, or deed, might be important to a future generation? If you have information on old buildings or sites in Lafayette, we'd like to know that, too.

Don't worry about whether or not it's important. Do you suppose Victor Hugo's mother knew?

Now, let's get out the box of pictures you took last summer. Write on the back--who, when, where--while you still remember. Your grandchildren will thank you.

Anyway . . . the Society may get them someday.

Ray Peters
President

IMPORTANT DATE . . .

April 24, Veteran's Hall: LHS Potluck Dinner and Annual Meeting

NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT

The term of four of the Directors of the Society is to expire this year. Those Directors are: Alice Breckling, Angela Broadhead, Ray Peters and George Wasson. Alice and Angela did not wish to be renominated. The Society should give them their thanks for serving this and other terms on this Board. Ray and George have agreed to renomination.

The Nominating Committee has asked Irene Van Overveen and Oliver Hamlin to have their names placed in nomination and the Committee submits the following nominations for election at the Annual Meeting to Directors of the Society for a three-year term ending in 1987:

Oliver Hamlin Ray Peters Irene Van Overveen George Wasson

In accord with the By-Laws of the Society, the Board is to elect from its members the Officers for the new year. The Nominating Committee has determined that members of the Board, present or newly elected, will be willing to serve in the capacity of President, Vice President and Treasurer. The office of Secretary will need to be filled when the new Board meets.

Nominating Committee:
George Wasson
Belinda Quintana
Andrew Young

IN MEMORIAM: Leroy Starks died on January 20, 1984 in Lafayette. Mr. Starks was born in Lafayette in 1904 and lived in Lafayette all his life. His father, Louis Ivan Starks, ran Starks Meat Market, located in the Lafayette Plaza area in the early nineteen hundreds. Along with his sister, Eleanor Meyers, Mr. Stark participated in LHS oral history interviews which have been placed in the Lafayette Historical Society archives at the town library.

Lafayette Historical Society members prepared a sizable display of historical photographs from our collection to show at the Landmarks Day celebration on March 10.

"ALL ABOARD" is the title of the latest historical exhibit on display in both the front and back windows of Conti Camera, located at 3518C Mt. Diablo Blvd. The display of old train photographs was arranged by Alice Breckling.

ANNUAL MEETING IS ON TUESDAY, APRIL 24

Our Annual Meeting is always a gala event. Once again it will be held at the Veterans Building (lower floor). The no-host bar will be open from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m.

The potluck dinner, which is under the direction of Edith Viguers, starts at 7:00 p.m. Subsequently we'll elect four Directors to replace those whose terms expire this year, and determine who's the winner of the raffle. Then it will be time for the program featuring Mr. Alessandro Baccari.

This gentleman has so many credits to his name it is difficult to do him justice--but here goes. He's a noted California historian, is the director of the Eureka Federal Savings Foundation Historical Museums and principal of a well-known public relations, advertising and market research firm.

A native of San Francisco, Mr. Baccari attended Santa Clara University and the University of California, where he majored in governmental affairs. He holds a masters degree in political science and economics plus a degree in fine arts, and he is an accomplished photographer.

His business life began as a governmental research writer, and he later wrote for newspapers and magazines. He was for some years director of the public relations and public affairs department of the Westinghouse Broadcasting Company, during which time he produced the award-winning night-time program "PM East - PM West," with Mike Wallace as host.

A resident of San Francisco, Mr. Baccari is much involved with public affairs. He has served as a consultant on charter revision, police department reorganization and community relations, drug abuse and urban transportation, including studies on the municipal railway, the San Francisco International Airport and the Fisherman's Wharf area.

Slides for his presentation, titled "A Glimpse at the Past" have been made from pictures specially chosen from our society's own collection.

COME TO THE APRIL 24th POTLUCK SUPPER AND ANNUAL MEETING. Members are asked to bring a casserole or salad that serves eight.

"PRESERVATION - LONG TERM CAPITAL GAIN" is the title of a conference, April 27 - May 1, in Sacramento sponsored by the California Preservation Foundation and several co-sponsors. The dual focus of the conference is on the proposed legislation of the California Heritage Task Force that will be presented to the State Capitol in March and the economic role that preservation plays in the economy of the state and nation.

The conference is designed to be of special interest to architects, engineers, contractors, old house restorers, investors, developers, tax consultants and historical societies.

There will be a gala opening reception at the Crocker Art Gallery, a barbecue at Sutter's Fort and a breakfast with the legislators, as well as sessions on issues of public policy, taxes and finance. Early registration fees are $60, $40 for students. For information on special workshops and program events, write to 1984 Historic Preservation Conference, c/o Sacramento Old City Association, P. O. Box 1022, Sacramento, CA 95805.

"A VISION ACHIEVED: FIFTY YEARS OF THE EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT," by Mimi Stein, is a beautiful commemorative history and a generously illustrated book. Based on interviews of people who helped shape the district, there are lots of historic photos and a lively narrative in the 125-page soft cover book available for $16.00 from the East Bay Regional Park District, Attention: Public Information, 11500 Skyline Blvd., Oakland, 94619. Make checks payable to East Bay Regional Park District and include your name and address. The publication was made possible by grants from the Robert Sibley Fund and the Mary C. Skaggs Foundation.

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WALKING TOURS were a popular feature of Landmarks Day, March 10. LHS members Sandy Kimball and Shirley Thomson are given a vote of thanks for preparing the self-guided tour information sheets which are enclosed in your current newsletter. Two Girl Scout troops also participated in the Society's walking tours during March.

ANTIQUE CARS PARADE April 29

The Lafayette Historical Society's fire engine will be part of the Chamber of Commerce's antique car parade on April 29.

CONTRA COSTA MAPS

The Contra Costa County Library in Pleasant Hill now has old town maps of 26 towns from the 1884 - 1943 years available on microfiche.

ORAL HISTORY

The recent Friends of the Lafayette Library talk on oral history by Elaine Dorfman has been tape recorded and will be available at the LHS file at the library.

LHS CONTRIBUTES TO CHURCH FUND

The Lafayette Historical Society has voted to present a check for $250 to the Lafayette United Methodist Church for the restoration of the historical portion of their building, and in addition, to donate the proceeds of the annual dinner meeting raffle for the same purpose. The raffle tickets are $1.00 each or $5.00 for 6 tickets, available from Dick Johnson at 283-0199. The raffle prize is one large historical photograph, framed.

Old Lafayette School

AN "EXOTIC" GARAGE SALE ON SATURDAY, APRIL 7 will be held from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the Lafayette United Methodist Church by auction and sealed bids to benefit the Church's building fund. Come and bid on a one-person sailboat (bids from $450 up), or on unusual doors from old churches donated by Owen Haskell. Fabrics and furniture will also be featured items. Bring your donations for the sale to the church on Friday, April 6. The auction on April 7 will also offer bell ringing of the church's 1892 bell and self-guided historic walking tours.

ARCHIVES ACQUISITIONS

An old family Bible found in a tank house on Jennie Bickerstaff Rosenberg's property, records 1813 births and marriages in Maine in the Johnson Thomas family. The Bible has been given to the Lafayette Historical Society by Mrs. Shelly.

A donation to the archives was made by Alice McNeil Russi. A delicately hand-worked and crocheted tea apron made by Mrs. James Bickerstaff (born in 1852 in Pennsylvania, died in 1925 in Lafayette), was given to Mrs. Russi by Mrs. Bickerstaff's daughter, Mrs. Rosenberg.

HISTORICAL RESEARCH can quickly become a dull and tedious process. Hours of poring over lists from Sheriff's Sales, lengthy legal descriptions, &c., can try the soul.

However, a light note frequently appears in the records. WITNESS THIS EXCERPT from the Contra Costa Gazette dated June 4, 1864, as gleaned from the book Clippings from the Contra Costa Gazette, compiled by Dorothy Mutnick, faithfully copied here in its delicious Victorian style:

THAT SAME OLD COON

Coons have a decided weakness for chicken meat, as those who keep poultry frequently find to their cost. Yielding to temptation, however, is not wholly unattended with difficulty and danger, as one of these interesting animals found to his cost on Wednesday night. He entered the chicken roost of Mr. E. Hook and selecting a chicken of tender years garroted it instanter, but the huge outcry of the other inmates reached the ears of Mr. H., who, suspecting mischief, rushed out with gun in hand. The rascal was caught flagrante delicto. A charge of shot, aimed in the dim uncertain light of a lantern, just missed him. A sensible coon would have got off with a whole skin, but this foolish animal, with the taste of that young chicken yet lingering on his palate, only ran a short distance, and then stopped to watch proceedings. The delay was fatal. A second charge laid him out very cold indeed.

Submitted by Ray Peters

STEIN HISTORY COLLECTION UNDER CARE OF ANDREW YOUNG

LHS's Andy Young has been unanimously named the Executive Director of the newly created History Center of the Contra Costa Historical Society. In his voluntary post, he will serve as the "on-site" boss of the facility which will store, preserve and catalog the Louis and Mildred Stein Collection. The Center will be housed in Room 5, Wing C at Oak Park Center, 1700 Oak Park Boulevard, in Pleasant Hill.

The collection will be fumigated and preserved by the Lowie Museum in Berkeley before being moved to the Center. Louis Stein, now 81 years old, donated the collection to the Center and has agreed to catalog the material, a process which may take a good year.

Mr. Stein has been amassing his collection of documents, diaries, maps and records from 1850's through the 1890's for over fifty years. He has also "taken pictures of things that are now gone," according to a feature article in the Contra Costa Times written by Katie Brown, who termed the collection "possibly the most spectacular private collection of Contra Costa history."

LAFAYETTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Self-guided Walking Tour of Historic Lafayette

1. Begin at the Lafayette Town Hall, corner of School Street and Moraga Road. It was built in 1914 by the Lafayette Improvement Association with funds donated by the public to fill the need for a community center. Popular as a place to hold dances in the early days, it was also used for civic and club meetings. Over the years it's served as a church and a nursery school. Remodeled into a theatre, it's currently the home of the Dramateurs.

2. Continue north on Moraga Road to the parking circle in front of Lafayette School. The town's fourth grammar school, it was built in 1927.

3. Walk on to the front of the Lafayette Library and look across Moraga Way to the Methodist Church. In the center of the main building you can easily identify the original Third School and its belfry. Built in 1894 for $2,000, it was sold to the Church in 1927 and became the nucleus of the new Church structure.

4. Go into the library to see a) Peter Thomson's blacksmith's anvil and b) town founder Elam Brown's lantern. The anvil, which was used by the smith from 1863 to 1924, was also shot off to announce the end of the Civil War and to celebrate the 4th of July each year.

   Brown used the lantern when he made the overland trek from Missouri to California in 1846.

   The Lafayette Historical Society files in the music room contain detailed information and photos about the city's history. The reference librarian has the keys to the files.

5. Continue up Moraga Road to Plaza Way and turn right. Stop at 3535 Plaza Way and read the plaque marking what was the Pioneer Store. It was opened in the early 1860's by Benjamin Shreve as a general store, insurance agency and post office. Robert Elam McNeil gave it the Pioneer Store name when he bought the place in 1902. It was a gathering place for the community, and for many years the only phone in town was located here.

6. Next door, at 3531 Plaza Way, read the plaque marking the Geils Building. It was built in the 1880's by Fred Geils as a tavern. A variety of businesses have been operated from this structure.

7. The next stop is the old Way Side Inn at 3521 Golden Gate Way. Built in 1894 as a hotel and tavern, it once boasted a wide porch where citizens met to pass the time of day. It, also, has served as home for a variety of local businesses.

8. Continue on to the parking lot just the other side of the theatre. Elam Brown's grist mill was located in this vicinity--an addition to the tiny community in 1853 which eliminated the long trip to San Jose for farmers wishing to have their wheat and barley converted to flour.

9. From this same point, look across Lafayette Creek. Here, traces of an ancient Indian burial ground have been discovered.

10. Look across Golden Gate Way. Behind the present gas station was a prominent hill which was leveled when Mt. Diablo Boulevard was extended in the 1930's. Atop the hill was the structure known as Templars Hall when it was built in the 1850's. Later, when it became the home of the Methodist Church, it was called the Church-on-the-Hill.

11. Retrace your steps and cross Plaza Way to Plaza Park. Here a wheel from Elam Brown's grist mill was imbedded in the wall in 1955 as a memorial to the town founder. The park land was deeded to the citizens of Lafayette by Elam Brown in 1864.

12. From this point look across Mt. Diablo Boulevard to a) the site of Peter Thomson's blacksmith shop (present Bank of America) and b) the old post office site (southeast corner of the Safeway parking lot). Thomson went to work for the town's first smith in 1859 and four years later bought the shop where he continued serving the community for 50 years.

    Originally the Post Office was in a corner of Benjamin Shreve's store. In 1904 Carrie Hough Van Meter became the postmaster in a tiny building located at the intersection of Mt. Diablo and Moraga Road.

13. Continue west on Mt. Diablo Boulevard to 3535 Mt. Diablo. This building was once the second Lafayette School and was originally located behind the third school that is now the core of the Methodist Church. It was moved to this site in 1927 and today is almost unrecognizable due to extensive remodeling.

14. In the next block, pause at the turreted brick building at 3565 which is being remodeled. Known as the Garrett Building, the structure was built in 1921 by an early realtor.

15. Retrace your steps and turn right at Lafayette Circle. The small, red frame structure on your right was formerly located on the corner facing Mt. Diablo. It was built in 1920 and has housed a restaurant, saloon and newspaper office among other businesses.

16. Just beyond, at 985 Lafayette Circle, read the plaque on the building that marks the site of Elam Brown's house. It was built in 1849 and razed in 1929.

17. Cut through the Fiesta Center to Moraga Road and back to the Methodist Church. Note the deodars planted in front by Pioneer Store owner Robert McNeil and his wife Gertrude, in 1927.

COMPLETE - TEAR OFF - MAIL WITH DUES

NAME _____
First Last Spouse

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____ DATE _____

Classification: (Circle one)	Student	Family	Business	Life
	$2.50	$5.00	$50.00	$100

SPECIAL INTERESTS: PLEASE CHECK IF YOU CAN HELP

____ Historic Preservation
____ Landmarks
____ Community Observer
____ Oral History
____ Typing
____ Other (describe)

_____
_____
_____
_____

____ Field Trips
____ Photographs
____ Research
____ Newspaper Clippings
____ Phoning

Name, Address & Phone Number of friends interested in joining:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Comments:

Mail to: LAFAYETTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 133
Lafayette, California, 94549

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FIRST CLASS MAIL